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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, and NEA/PPD
NSC FOR SHAPIRO/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PHUM PINS SCUL KPAL KWBG KPAO
SUBJECT: Ministry of Education Agrees to Student Demands, Avoiding General Strike

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Responding to an Education Ministry proposal to revamp the student loan mechanism, the Palestinian Student Councils' Union called for a general student strike at all Palestinian universities in the West Bank for February 22 and 23. The strikes were averted when PA Minister of Education Lamis al-Alami met with the Union on February 19 and agreed to their demands to keep the mechanism as is. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Under the existing structure, enrolled students can borrow from the PA at the beginning of each semester without a guarantor or co-signee. A guarantor is only required upon the student's graduation, when a clear schedule for loan repayment is also set. However, for the upcoming spring semester, the Ministry had proposed to require a guarantor for loans while a student is still enrolled in university.

¶3. (SBU) The Student Councils' Union, the unaffiliated umbrella organization for all Palestinian university student councils, rejected the proposed change immediately and complained that it would place an undue burden on students, many of whom do not have family members of sufficient means to act as guarantors. The Union also urged students not to register for the spring semester. Universities immediately felt the impact, with only a third of all students at Hebron University registering prior to February 19, according to Vice President for Academic Affairs of Hebron University, Dr. Ahmed Atawneh.

¶4. (SBU) Al-Alami met with union leaders and deans of student affairs from various West Bank universities on February 19 and agreed not to change the mechanism for student loans. She also agreed to help with loan repayments for the neediest students, approximately 20 per cent of borrowers.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: The speed with which the Minister acceded to the Union's demands is testament to the power of the student movement and to the relative weakness of the Education Minister. End Comment.
WALLES